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An epicurean way to enjoy chocolate

New lounge offers spot to savor sweet treats

By LAURA TUCKER
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About 10 miles from the Ethel M. Chocolates factory in Henderson is the new Ethel's Chocolate Lounge, located at the Fashion Show mall.

The lounge, furnished with warm, bright colors and wafting with the scent of chocolate, and the chocolate collections branded with the same name, are being touted by the Mars Retail Group as a modern take on chocolate dining.

"It takes the chocolate that Las Vegas has known for all these years and gives us a new opportunity and way to deliver it," said John Haugh, president of Mars Retail Group, a division of Mars Inc. "It's a little more up to date. It gives you a more contemporary approach."

On the menu at Ethel's is a variety of coffees, beverages, fondues and, of course, chocolate. Prices for chocolate vary from \$1.50 for a single piece to a \$42 48-piece box. The sweets can be purchased online, at the factory or inside Ethel's.

"We wanted to take premium chocolate and make it more approachable, more everyday," Haugh said.

He said the company sought to accomplish this goal by presenting "no mystery middles" in its five new collections of chocolates.





The nut and caramel collection features chocolates mixed with pecans, macadamias and almonds blended with caramel.

The fruit collection contains combinations of fruits, such as key lime, lemon, mango-coconut and others.

The truffle collection is filled with spherical chocolates of familiar flavors.

The cocktail collection contains a blend of chocolate with a bit of alcoholic flavors: mojitos, cosmos, margaritas, cosmos and others.

The American Pop collection, meant to capture the tastes people enjoyed as children, include apple pie, pudding and the most popular piece -- peanut butter and jelly.

Haugh said Ethel's will offer two collections for the holiday season, including a dark chocolate and holiday collection.

He said the Ethel's collections are straightforward, clearly illustrating what the chocolate is through art. The cocktail pieces contain mini chocolate paintings of each drink.

"We don't try to sell things that are really exotic. We would rather stick with flavors and taste profiles," Haugh said.

Ethel's also allows patrons to reserve slots for parties, ranging from one hour to all day. For an additional charge, the shop will close its doors or extend its hours for private parties.

Haugh said the company decided on the lounge concept after speaking with people and realizing that they often were unsure of where to consume their chocolate.

"We thought wouldn't it be neat if you could sit in a lounge that was all things chocolate -- warm and comfortable and smelled like chocolate," Haugh said.

Ethel's is the first in Las Vegas, with 10 other locations already located in Chicago, where Mars Inc., is based. Some of the lounges in Chicago are stand-alone buildings rather than in a mall like the Fashion Show. Haugh said he is unsure whether the company will add more Ethel's lounges in Las Vegas, but said it does plan to open Ethel's locations in other cities.

A group of women from the Spring Meadow Presbyterian Church stopped in to enjoy a large fondue platter and mugs of house coffee in October. The women chose Ethel's to celebrate the departure of Reneé Vick, a missionary whom the church is sponsoring in Senegal.

Group member Chimaine Shadd said the lounge was hip and the wait staff inviting.

"They let us try anything," Shadd said. "This beats Starbucks."

Shadd said the setting in Ethel's was better for a special occasion than a coffee lounge.

"We were just saying we didn't know the last time we sat around and ate chocolate," said Linda McCarthy, another woman in the group.

Susan Donovan, who also dined on the fondue, said she enjoyed her Ethel's experience.

"Chocolate in the afternoon in Sin City. Is this not sinful?" Donovan said. "Well, it feels sinful."

Ethel's is open from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturday, and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Sunday. To order chocolates or for more information, visit www.ethelschocolate.com

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